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FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ  
TO RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7687

UNCLAS LA PAZ 001294

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BOLIVIA: RESPONSE TO INFORMATION ON FORCED LABOR  
AND CHILD LABOR IN THE PRODUCTION OF GOODS FOR MANDATORY  
CONGRESSIONAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

REF: STATE 43120

11. SUMMARY: In response to State 43120, Labor Officer held meetings with USAID, the Bolivian Ministry of Labor, NGO Proadolescente, and UNICEF. Three areas of concern regarding the use of child labor and forced labor are the sugar, Brazil nut, and mining industries. Sources were not able to give specific violator companies but rather emphasized Bolivian society's tolerant attitude toward child labor. In most cases it is the parents who force their children to work. Through the Ministry of Labor's Commission for the Eradication of Child Labor, the Bolivian government has several programs to combat child labor and forced labor. UNICEF reports excellent working relations with the Ministries of Labor, Education, and Health. The following reflects the information obtained about each specific industry.

12. SUGAR: Thousands of indigenous Bolivians are recruited annually to work in the sugar camps located in the Eastern region of Bolivia (Santa Cruz and Tarija departments). Normally, the male workers are unable to meet their required "quota" so they then enlist family members (spouse, minor children) to assist and supplement production. Thus the minor children are unable to attend schools and must work long hours in the fields. UNICEF Official Patrizia Benvenuti also said there are cases of induced indebtedness in the sugar industry. Workers recruited to work in the fields are advanced money against their future salary. The debts increase once on-site due to high costs charged these workers for food, shelter, etc.

13. Eva Udaeta, Director of the Bolivian Ministry of Labor's Commission for the Eradication of Child Labor, points out the Ministry's successful tripartite program, in which the Ministry of Labor, with workers unions and sugar cane field owners formed a working group in 2005. Udaeta says that the owners "know it (child labor) is a problem" and have signed an agreement to use best practices in the industry. The tripartite group addresses salaries, housing conditions, health and education. The Ministry of Labor employs two inspectors in the sugar cane industry.

14. BRAZIL NUT: There is a similar situation in the Brazil nut industry in the Amazonian region of northern Bolivia (Pando and Beni departments). Production quotas placed on workers are often unreachable and so men enlist family members to satisfy their respective work requirements. The Ministry of Labor is trying to establish a tripartite group similar to the sugar group. UNICEF's Program Coordinator Clemencia Aramburu said child labor in the Brazil nut industry is a real problem but "you cannot classify all Bolivian Brazil nuts as a product of child or forced labor." UNICEF is finalizing a study of the Bolivian nut industry and

will make it available to Post. OPIC insures a Brazil nut factory in the Beni and conducted an inspection in June 2007 that found no child labor. The Ministry of Labor, through UNICEF funding, employs one inspector in the Riberalta area of Beni.

¶5. MINING: The mining industry is labor intensive and employs minor children in unhealthy working conditions. The mining centers of Oruro and Potosi departments employ thousands of indigenous Bolivians. Private cooperative mining groups are loosely regulated and usually formed by groupings of various families. The result is the use of child labor. Raquel Zurita of the NGO Proadolescente says that one of the most difficult issues in the mining industry are indigenous cultural beliefs (Aymaran and Quechuan) that accept and even promote the use of child labor. The Ministry of Labor, through UNICEF funding, employs one inspector in Potosi.

¶6. COMMENT: Both UNICEF and NGO Proadolescente gave high marks to the Ministry of Labor for its efforts to curb child and forced labor. High marks were also given to the sugar and Brazil nut industry owners for acknowledging that the problem exists and working to take steps against such incidences. UNICEF would like to initiate a "child free labor" certificate program in Bolivia but acknowledges this is still in the planning phase. However, all groups consulted mentioned a culture of permissiveness and acceptance when it comes to child labor in Bolivia. End comment.  
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